

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

GENERATIONAL THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITING THE MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

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This study intends to examine the current challenge that the Army has with recruiting. Using generational theory, it will review the characteristics, beliefs, values, and attitudes of Generation X, the Baby Boomers, and the Millennial generation, the target audience of the Army's current recruiting efforts. Specifically, it will investigate the Millennial generation's attitudes about military service and how the older generations' personalities impact their decision to serve. Additionally, it will take a look at the Army's current recruiting strategies, current recruiting trends, as well as the Army's chief competitors for new recruits. Finally, the study will offer up recommendations to improve recruiting for the Millennial generation

GENERATIONAL THEORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITING THE MILLENNIALS

Manning the force is a critical component of the overall national security plan. It is arguably the most important, in that without the proper numbers of people serving in the proper places, the military's missions can not be accomplished. In 1969 near the end of the Viet-Nam war, President Nixon ordered a commission to evaluate the feasibility of establishing an all-volunteer force. Based on the results of this evaluation, the President established the all-volunteer force as the method to man the military's ranks in 1973.¹ Paragraph C, section 467 of the Military Selective Service Act (Title 50, of the U.S.Code), established the all-volunteer force and stated that, "no person shall be inducted for training and service in the Armed Forces after July 1, 1973..."² The abolition of the military draft in 1973 was historic, in that it was the first time that the U.S. ever officially adopted a national policy on the establishment of the all-volunteer force. The idea was also very controversial, having been opposed by most of the military, Congress, Nixon's advisers, and most of the media.³ In the last 32 years, the all-volunteer force (AVF) has remained the basis for the national policy that the United States has relied on to man its ranks. It has not always been easy, either. Numerous operational deployments combined with many external factors during that period have tested the policy. Today, with the President still committed to the all-volunteer force while we are a nation involved in a protracted war, the policy on recruiting the AVF is especially relevant.

The foundation of force management in an all-volunteer force is recruiting. The military's effort to attract the right quality and quantity of volunteers to fill its ranks is a deliberate process and is accomplished on a strategic level by all services on an ongoing basis. The numerous contingencies around the world which currently exist have placed severe demands on the personnel from all the services and on all components within each service; Active, Reserve, and National Guard. Since the beginning of Operations Enduring Freedom in 2001 and Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the Army has borne the largest share of the combat burden and has found itself stretched to its limits in terms of OPTEMPO. ⁴ Given the fact that the United States has never had to rely totally on an all-volunteer force to fight an extended war, this combat stress, combined with other extraneous factors, has created a significant challenge for the military in meeting its recruiting goals.⁵ In fact, at the end of FY2005, the Army closed the books on one of the leanest recruiting years since it became an all-volunteer service three decades ago.⁶ The military leadership has also begun to recognize this challenge. In an email to the leadership on 17 October 2005, the Chief of Staff of the Army listed his top three priorities for the Army. The priorities he specified were to "Win the long war while sustaining the all-volunteer force, recruit

and retain soldiers, while providing a quality of life commensurate with the quality of their service.”⁷

Over the last twenty-five years, the military has had relatively positive results in its efforts to recruit its force with only some exceptions. In the 1980's, with average unemployment rates lingering above 8%, the military was overall extremely successful in recruiting the number of soldiers it needed each year.⁸ The high unemployment rate is advantageous to military recruiting, as it helps to provide a larger pool of qualified potential recruits. In the early to mid 1990's, even with the unemployment rate dropping drastically to an average of 6.4 percent, the military was able to meet its recruiting goals, helped largely by the fact that the United States was then in the process of reducing the size of its Armed Forces, which lowered the numbers of new soldiers required.⁹ Because of the way that the high unemployment rate and the drawdown of the military positively affected recruiting until the mid-90's, it was able to meet its goals largely by focusing only on the high-school senior market. By 1995, however, with the unemployment rate remaining low and with the recruiting pool showing less of a propensity to serve in the military, this strategy of excluding the college and college-bound market resulted in trying times for recruiting.¹⁰ From 2000-2004, the military met its recruiting goals, although not easily, perhaps due to tactical improvements related to recruiting the post high-school segment as mentioned above, combined with a renewed sense of patriotism immediately following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001.

An example of the current challenge the military is beginning to have with recruiting the all-volunteer force can be seen when looking at the recent recruiting results of its largest service, the Army. On 1 October 2005, while the rest of the military announced meeting its recruiting goals, the Army announced that for FY 2005, the active Army missed its enlistment target by the largest margin since 1979, a gap of close to 7,000 enlistees and that the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, which are smaller than the regular Army, had even worse results.¹¹ In 1979, the Army missed its recruiting goal by over 17,000 during a period when the Army was much bigger and its recruiting goal was double what it is today.¹² While Army officials maintain that the current recruiting shortfalls are not yet a crisis, there are impacts that will eventually be felt. A debate exists on whether or not the Army should expand its ranks, for example, to ease the high OPTEMPO that soldiers are experiencing. This recruiting shortfall will create a huge challenge for any expansion unless quality requirements are reduced or unless some type of draft is put in place. And to complicate matters even more, at the same time that these recruiting challenges are occurring, the Army is beginning to feel other effects of long and repeated deployments. Young officers, most of them Army captains, are beginning to

leave the Army at higher rates.¹³ According to Retired Army MG Robert Scales, Jr., former Army War College Commandant, the combination of these recruiting shortfalls and retention challenges means the Army will have an aging force with higher personnel costs, and the Army will likely retain marginal troops because of the shortages.¹⁴ And LTG (Ret) Theodore Stroup, Jr., former Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, comments that the impact of thousands fewer recruits this year and possibly next year will also likely burden the soldiers overseas or preparing to head back for another tour. "The ripple effects are more extensions to tours and earlier repeat tours. The Army will continue to be stretched and strained," he said.¹⁵

So what has caused these recruiting challenges anyway? The newspapers tell us that "the rising casualty rate in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with the stronger economy that is creating better jobs at home, has 17-to-24 year olds, who might otherwise join up, thinking twice."¹⁶ And it's not only the 17-to-24 year olds who are balking. According to polling data, parents are increasingly souring on letting their children take part on the war on terror.¹⁷ This is not surprising, given the fact that less and less of the parental generation, the older baby boomers, have served in the military. The number of veterans in the population fell 4% from 1990 to 2000, a trend that is expected to continue, and most of these veterans that are still alive served in the Vietnam War, a fact that might cause them to be reluctant to recommend service because perhaps they are at odds with their past.¹⁸ In any case, only 11 percent of adults currently recommend service to youth in their life.¹⁹

The economy is another key environmental factor that impacts recruiting policy. Intuitively, the stronger the economy, the more likely that potential recruiting prospects will try out the civilian job market first. In other words, what is good for the economy is not normally good for recruiting. In the words of former Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera, "a stronger economy means that young people have more options available to them if they decide not to go straight to college after high school."²⁰ We saw that in the 1980's, with the average unemployment rates lingering above 8%, the military was overall extremely successful in recruiting the numbers of soldiers it needed each year.²¹ The improving economy of the 90's did put more of a strain on recruiting, but this was largely offset by the fact that the military was downsizing.²² Today, the current unemployment rate of 5% is not helping recruiting and suggests that to meet recruiting goals as specified in the DoD recruiting policy, recruiters will have to find creative ways to compete with civilian employers.²³

Another possible cause for the tough recruiting climate has to do with political considerations and how they affect the youth of today. Thinking back on the last presidential

election, John Kerry during the campaign, suggested that if President George Bush were reelected, he would reinstitute the draft.²⁴ However, since being reelected, President Bush has reiterated his position for an all-volunteer force.²⁵ In any case, all the talk about a potential draft and recruiting end strengths during the campaign surely provided angst for many parents who felt their children were being targeted by politicians for service, either through voluntary enlistment or through a draft. With their guard up because of this political banter, parents were, and will continue to be, less likely to nudge their kids toward military service. There are other causes that play into the current recruiting challenge, such as demographics and education that will impact to some degree the target market's propensity to serve. Surveys tracking young men ages 16-21 and their inclination to join the military indicate that since hitting a peak in October 2002, the trend in propensity to join the military has gradually declined.²⁶ All of these causes will require the Army leadership to come up with effective and creative methods of recruiting the force, because as Mr. Keith Hauk in an article in the *Military Review* wrote, "with the changes in the economic and educational environments, the term "all-volunteer force" is a misnomer; today's American military is really an 'all-recruited force'".²⁷

Patriotism and the so called civil-military gap are two related factors to consider when looking at the current recruiting challenge. It would seem intuitive that a greater sense of patriotism would help recruiting. After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, it was easy to sense a renewed feeling of patriotism in this country. Unfortunately, this "flag waving" did not translate into an increase in the number of people seeking entry into the Armed Forces.²⁸ One of the primary reasons that this patriotism did not result in better recruiting trends was and is because of the gap that exists between the Armed Forces and society. Less of our society seems to be able to relate to the military and this is adversely affecting recruiting. One reason for this is because the service in the military is no longer a shared experience. In the recent Congress, among men, only 40 percent of the Senators and 30 percent of the House of Representatives were veterans, and this number is expected to decline even more in the future.²⁹ Additionally, fewer and fewer parents are encouraging their children to serve, and this is contributing to the civil-military gap and is adversely affecting recruiting as well.³⁰ The implication for executing the recruiting policy is that any strategy to get the numbers and quality required must target the parents of the prospects as well. Additionally, patriotism can not be relied on as a means to convince youth to serve.

Demographic trends are extremely important when considering recruiting policy. Contrary to many reports in the media, the youth population, ages 15-19, is projected to grow about 11% between now and 2025.³¹ While this does represent growth, it is only slow growth.

The upshot is that recruiters are not going to be able to rely much on improving demographics in the next 20 years to help them meet policy goals.

The military has long prided itself on the fact that it is racially and ethnically diverse, and it has already been discussed that DoD recruiting policy directs that inconsistencies and inequities with regard to race and ethnicity are to be avoided. Thus, the racial and ethnic makeup of the population are environmental factors that certainly impact strategy to adhere to the recruiting policy. An increase in immigration in the last decades of the 20th century increased the overall racial diversity of the U.S. population. Additionally, the nation's minority population is much younger than the overall population, a fact which is extremely important to the military due to its youthful age profile.³² As a result, to meet the aims of recruiting policy, it is important for recruiting planners to understand the current trends with regard to minority demographics. The projection for the future, for example, suggests that our population will become even more diverse and younger.³³ Thus it will be increasingly difficult for the military to remain an organization that is representative of society.

Education, or the propensity of high school graduates to attend college, is an external factor which influences recruiting policy. Higher college attendance rates reduce the size of the traditional high-quality recruiting market, and the college attendance rate among graduating high school seniors has risen substantially over the last decade.³⁴ This is a tough predicament for military recruiters, given the fact that the recruits needed in the military today must have more of an aptitude for high tech jobs, and given the complexity of military occupational skills. On the one hand, college bound youth are less likely to be interested in military service, but on the other, those planning on college are qualified with the skills and abilities needed for increasingly technical military roles.³⁵ Current research shows that the understood implications for recruiters are threefold. First, levels of high school completion, either by diploma or GED, will remain stable. Second, a greater share of high school graduates will be interested in furthering their education at some time into the future. And third, the numbers of youth graduating with a non-standard diploma or GED will increase in the future.³⁶ This means that finding ways to allow recruits to further their education will remain crucial in the future.

Another extremely important environmental factor that affects the recruiting policy, and the focus of this paper, is the generational make-up of the prospective recruits. The attitudes, values, and beliefs of teenagers regarding military service have greatly influenced their propensity to serve over the years, and as a result, have impacted recruiting policy. Since the all-volunteer force was established 32 years ago, these attitudes, values, and beliefs have been determined in large part by generational factors, or the overriding characteristics found within

each generation. During this period, military recruiters have had to be flexible enough to deal with three major generational shifts. In 1973, the target audience for recruiting came from the so called Baby Boom Generation. Those born into this generation were born between 1943 and 1960.³⁷ Those born into the next generation, known as Generation X, were born between 1960 and 1980.³⁸ The generation currently being recruited is known as the Millennial generation and they were born after 1981.³⁹ Each of these three groups had and has unique and important characteristics that military recruiters must be familiar with. After providing an overview of the two previous generations, this paper will focus on the Millennial generation. Looking at generational theory, this study will look at the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the Millennials in order to ascertain the factors that influence their views on military service. Additionally, it will explore recommendations for recruiting and leading this important segment of society.

Generational Theory. In their generational theory, authors William Strauss and Neil Howe propose that society alternates between a cycle of growth, conformity, decay, and divisiveness and that each cycle is driven by the changes in the values and attitudes of each new generation. Each one of these cycles is about the length of a human life and is divided into four phases they call turnings. They associate, for example, a turning with a specific generation. To capture one entire cycle or four turnings, it is helpful to recognize which generation is associated with which turning. Without getting too bogged down into the details, these authors label the four turnings as the Prophet generation, the Nomad generation, the Hero generation, and the Artist generation, respectively. The Prophet generation/first turning begins the cycle in the aftermath of an epic struggle. The Boomer generation, which evolved after World War II (1943-1960), is a Prophet generation which began the latest cycle according to Strauss and Howe. The Nomad generation/second turning begins with society being shaken to the core by a dramatic challenge to its basic values and institutions. The Generation-X generation, which evolved during and after the Viet-Nam war (1961-1980), is a Nomad generation. The Hero generation/third turning is associated with the Millennial generation, and began in 1981. Its members are still being born today and will transition sometime into the future into an Artist generation/fourth turning which Strauss and Howe have labeled the Homeland generation.⁴⁰ For the purposes of this paper, the most important thing to realize is that each of these generations is unique in character.

Before looking at each of the generations that recruiters have had to deal with, it is first important to gain an understanding of exactly what a generation is. There are a variety of accepted definitions out there. Previously mentioned generational theorists and experts Bill

Strauss and Neil Howe define a generation as the “aggregate of all people born over roughly the span of a phase of life who share a common location in history and, hence, a common collective persona.”⁴¹ Or, as Don Tapscott in his book Growing Up Digital writes, “A generation exists mostly in the minds of the people who belong to it. Generations are forged through common experience.”⁴²

The Baby Boomer Generation. This generation was born between 1943 and 1960. In addition to being a postwar phenomenon, this generation marked the beginning of a reversal of an American population trend. Almost precisely nine months after the end of World War II, more babies were born every minute than ever before, and because of the improvements in modern medicine, more of them survived what had previously been the highest mortality period in a human’s life.⁴³ They grew up during a time of economic prosperity and also during a time of rebellion (as evidenced by the Viet-Nam war protests) and indulgence (as evidenced by Woodstock and mini-skirts). This generation also witnessed a level of violence and social conflict which marked an extremely turbulent time. The assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, race riots, and hippies with their long hair and strange dress left most people with distinct opinions and memories about this generation. Other seminal events that occurred for this generation were:⁴⁴

- 1955 Salk Vaccine tested on the public
- 1955 Rosa Parks refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama
- 1957 First nuclear power plant
- 1957 Congress passes Civil Rights Act
- 1960 Birth control pills introduced
- 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1963 President John Kennedy assassinated
- 1965 United States sends ground combat troops to Vietnam
- 1968 Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated
- 1969 Woodstock
- 1970 Kent State University shootings

In the workforce, Boomers were and are very goal oriented and often work relentlessly to achieve them, even at the expense of their families and personal lives. Boomer women began to enter the workforce as a result of both the independence which characterized this generation and the feminist movement which became center stage. With both parents working, many of the children of this generation (known as Generation Xers) grew up with nannies and spending a lot time at daycare. The stress of the dual working family and a greater acceptance of divorce also lead to a higher divorce rate among Boomers, which had impacts on the next generation

which will be discussed later. Other personality traits that authors Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak mention for the Boomers are:⁴⁵

- *They believe in growth and expansion.* They were fascinated by the promise of the last great frontier, and for them, this was space.
- *They think of themselves as stars of the show.* In 1967, *Time Magazine* actually gave their Man of the Year award to the Baby Boomer generation, with the promise that this generation would clean up our cities, end racial inequality, and find the cure for the common cold.
- *They tend to be optimistic.* The planet was and is theirs to shape. They look at the world with infinite possibilities.
- *They learned about teamwork, both at home and at work.* Because there were so many of them, they had to learn to cooperate and graduate.
- *They have pursued their own personal gratification, uncompromisingly, and often at a high price to themselves and others.* When unhappy with a marriage, a job, an arrangement, they simply find a way to move on (divorce, change jobs, etc.).
- *They have searched their souls-repeatedly, obsessively, and recreationally.* Thought provoking drugs in the 60's, yoga classes, and spirituality and well-being books and classes were important.
- *The Boomers have always been cool.* No explanation needed!

With the 1960's dominated by the decade-long war in the Viet-Nam, public protests often became violent and the country seemed to be polarized and frustrated. While many boomers served their country honorably in the military, either by volunteering or because of the draft, many others evaded service by leaving the country. An anti-military attitude seemed to persist throughout society, and many anecdotal examples have been passed down through the years about soldiers in uniform at airports or ROTC cadets at colleges being mistreated. The research also bears out the fact that boomer youth did not support the military during this period. In a survey conducted by Aaron Nadel in 1973 (Attitude of Youth Towards Military Service, Office of the Secretary of Defense), only 28% of those polled agreed that some military service was expected and 40% stated that nothing could induce them into military service.⁴⁶ This was clearly different from the World War II generation, or the "greatest generation" as labeled by Tom Brokaw, who did not protest when they got the call to fight across the bloodied landscape of Europe and the South Pacific.⁴⁷ Boomers have made significant contributions to the military since the Viet-Nam years. They produced the AirLand Battle doctrine and the National Training Center, for example, which in large part helped our military to succeed in the first major conflict after the Viet-Nam war, Operation Desert Storm, even after being totally

frustrated during the Carter years with the problem of the hollowing out of the military.⁴⁸ The Boomers were also largely responsible for the culminating victory in the Cold War. On the other hand, they were also responsible for creating a zero defects workplace with careerism, inflated efficiency reports, and micromanagement commonplace in military units.⁴⁹ Today, the Boomers represent the highest level of our military's leadership.

Finally, authors Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak look at a variety of principals and make recommendations on how to treat the Boomers with regard to each one. In terms of recruiting the Boomers, some of the recommendations they put forth were:⁵⁰

- Let them know their experience will be valued. They want to know they'll get credit and respect for their accomplishments.
- Challenge them, i.e., tell them "You're going to come in here and really make a difference." This could very well be where the Army got its "*Be All You Can Be*" idea.
- Show them places where they can excel and how they can be a star.
- Promote the leading-edge nature of your organization. I can't help but to think of the Marine's advertising slogan "*The Few, the Proud, the Marines*" which capitalized on this principal.

Generation X. Born between 1960 and 1980, this generation also had unique experiences which helped to shape and mold it. Arriving virtually in the shadow of the Boomers and basically unnoticed, they developed a cynical, pragmatic, survivor mentality as they experienced a world much less peaceful than their predecessors.⁵¹

Some of the more important events that occurred for this generation include:⁵²

1972	Arab Terrorists at Munich Olympics
1973	Watergate scandal
1973	Energy crisis begins
1976	Tandy and Apple market PCs
1979	Three Mile Island
1979	Iran holds Americans hostage
1980	John Lennon shot and killed
1986	Challenger disaster
1989	Exxon Valdez oil spill
1989	Fall of the Berlin wall
1991	Operation Desert Storm

As previously mentioned, this generation had parents that often became overworked and focused on accomplishing personal achievements. As a result, children from this generation were often neglected and overlooked.⁵³ The X'er's world was one that was brought directly into living-rooms due to the improved technology of the media. Military conflicts (Grenada, Panama,

the Gulf War, Bosnia, and Kosovo), murder investigations and trials (O.J. Simpson), and sexual scandals of the nation's leadership (President Clinton) were broadcast real-time and non-stop and directly influenced the levels of cynicism and trust of superiors for this generation. As these neglected children grew up without their wage-earning parents in the home, their time was often spent alone watching television, playing video games, or using the computer.⁵⁴ These habits had both negative and positive consequences in developing the personality of the X'ers. On the negative side, with the television becoming the primary babysitter of the X'er children, they witnessed more acts of violence, murders, and crime than any other generation in history.⁵⁵ Understandably, this helped to foster an unrealistic and unhealthy view of reality for many in this generation. On the positive side, X'ers became extremely independent, having to make decisions without their parents around, and they also became extremely comfortable using the computer.⁵⁶ Some other generational traits as provided by Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak are:⁵⁷

- *They are seeking a sense of family.* With their parents always away, this generation learned to create a family from their circle of friends. The popular sitcom "Friends" is based on this premise.
- *They want balance.* Watching their parents focus only on work, this generation wants to "work to live" as opposed to their parents who "lived to work."
- *They have a nontraditional orientation about time and space.* This generation does not feel it needs to be in the workplace from 9-5 as long as they are getting their work done. They believe in working to standard, not to time.
- *They like informality.* They want to see things lighten up, they enjoy being casual, and actually believe that they work better in an informal setting. Along these same lines, their approach to authority is casual.
- *They are attracted to the edge.* Boomers may have gained their sense of adventure from the workplace, but the X'ers get their kicks elsewhere. Think X-games!

When looking to recruit this generation, it's important to look at the personality traits described above. For instance, it is important for X'ers to know that they are welcomed to and expected to have a balanced life outside the workplace. They should be encouraged to live on the edge. Think about the Navy's recruiting slogan, "It's not just a job, it's an adventure," or the Army's recruiting slogan, "Get an Edge on Life," both used with some degree of success in the late 80's to mid 90's.⁵⁸ Additionally, X'ers needed to know that they were being recruited to work in a fun and relaxed environment and also a place where technological innovation would

occur. And finally, since they don't want to be micro-managed and want to juggle multiple projects at once, this generation needs to know that their workplace will be like this.⁵⁹

The Millennials. Born between 1980 and 2000, this is the generation the military is recruiting now and will be for another 13 years or so. This generation has a variety of names. In addition to being known as the Millennial Generation, researchers have dubbed them the "Net Generation," "Generation Y" (the generation after Generation X), the "Echo Boom" (offspring of the Baby Boomers), "Screenagers" (as opposed to teenagers), "Generation Why" (because they question everything), the "Dot.com Generation" (because of their affinity for technology), and "Generation Next."⁶⁰

Whatever their name, (and they prefer to call themselves the Millennials)⁶¹ this generation is forecast to be the largest generation ever and the most studied of all the cohorts yet.⁶² The members of this generation mostly come from small families, on average the smallest families ever, since they are spread over more of them.⁶³ As a result, their parents are able to provide a higher standard of living for these Millennials, which no doubt has impacted their attitudes, values, and beliefs. Their attitudes about gender have set them apart from other generations, for instance. They are the first generation to grow up with true images of female empowerment and in a culture that has made gender neutrality the norm.⁶⁴ With the traditional family norm (homemaker mom, working dad) shattered, the Millennials have learned to fend for themselves, and this no doubt has had a profound effect on their attitudes.

Some of the key events and trends that have influenced this generation are⁶⁵:

- Focus of the child
- Violence: Oklahoma City bombing, Columbine shootings
- Technology
- Busy, overplanned lives
- Stress
- Clinton/Lewinsky affair

And other events that made large impressions on this generation from researchers Howe and Strauss⁶⁶:

- The war in Kosovo
- Princess Di's death
- O.J. Simpson trial
- Rodney King riots
- Fall of the Berlin Wall
- McGwire-Sosa homerun derby

Other key facts about the Millennials that impact the way they see the world are⁶⁷:

- This generation is more racially diverse than any other. More than one in three is not Caucasian.
- Seventy-four percent of kids have friends of a different race or ethnic religion.
- One in four lives in a single-parent household.
- Three in four have working mothers.
- Fifty-nine percent have a TV in their bedroom.
- Sixty-five percent report regular in-home computer use.
- The Millennial Generation's medium of choice is the Internet.

And the top three worries of the 9 to 17 year olds in this generation are: 1) not doing well in school, 2) not having enough money, and 3) getting cancer.⁶⁸

A compilation of the research which has attempted to assign a personality to the Millennials show that the following are the most agreed upon characteristics for this generation⁶⁹:

- Because they have grown up in an era of relative economic prosperity, they are much more motivated and optimistic about the future than previous generations.
- They are very entertainment driven. Therefore, marketers spend a lot of time and energy targeting these youth.
- They are not afraid to spend money on items they desire.
- They are the most marketing savvy and brand conscious generation in American history.
- They are extremely comfortable with technology.
- Besides the worries above, they also worry about experiencing violence and peer pressure.
- They are relatively inactive and prefer to watch TV and surf the Internet rather than engage in physical activity.
- They are also heavy users of traditional media such as television, radio, and magazines.⁷⁰
- They have a strong sense of community, thus the peer pressure mentioned above.
- They are team players.
- They are extremely confident. This may make them appear brash or arrogant, but this comes from their parents who put them at the center of the universe.
- They believe that tolerance and acceptance are core values.
- They are extremely adaptable.
- They innovate constantly.
- They respond quickly.
- They are extremely loyal and committed.

Additionally, other research points to the fact the Millennials, on the whole, are more likely than their Generation X predecessors to join something in which they can feel pride and a

sense of purpose.⁷¹ Understanding this fact can have important implications for recruiting and recruiting strategies.

All of the personality traits above are important in terms of figuring out how to attract young men and women from this generation into the military. Equally important, however, are the major forces that influence the Millennials and their existing attitudes about serving in the military. The following sections will discuss these topics.

The Influences. Andrew Wilcox, in completing his Naval Post Graduate thesis entitled “Recruiting the Next Generation: A Study of Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs,” proposed that there are five basic forces of influence on an individual considering military service: Parents, technology, the New economy, education, and the media.⁷² Some of these forces are similar to the external factors that impact recruiting policy, as discussed earlier, but it is worth reviewing them in light of how they affect this generation specifically. These five forces are all interconnected. For example, the rise in technology is driving the new economy. Parents are demanding more from education. Both technology and the new economy are requiring students who are better educated. And so on. When looking at each of these forces individually, it is possible to gain insight as to how the Millennials might be targeted for recruitment into the military.

In looking at the parents, it is critical to understand some of the most basic trends found in the Millennial family unit. According to authors Howe and Strauss, there is reason for optimism here. What might seem to go against conventional wisdom, Millennial kids are actually getting more supervision than previous generations, Millennial kids are actually spending more time with parents, families are still doing things together, child abuse is on the decline, and parents are still disciplining their kids.⁷³ In short, the family unit is making a comeback. With regard to military service, the parental influence becomes problematic. Boomer parents have less and less direct experience with the military, tend to be overprotective of them, and as a result are not likely to urge or support them in serving in the Armed Forces.⁷⁴ Additionally, the education level of these parents is also important in determining whether their children are likely to serve. Ms. Cheryl Shumate, in her doctoral work looking at youth propensity to serve in the military, found that youth with more educated parents are less likely to serve. And she feels that this finding could come as a result of parents’ feelings about the Vietnam War.⁷⁵

Education is huge as an influencer of this generation. As mentioned earlier, this generation places a great deal of pressure on themselves to perform well in school. This

probably comes in large part because of the fact that they know they are expected to go to college after high school graduation. It's no surprise that colleges are probably the chief competitor for military recruits. After all, they are both after high school graduates who are looking for a challenge and want to improve themselves. One potential new target market for military recruiting presents itself because of this emphasis on education, and that is the students attending community college. Research has shown that a large percentage of those attending community college never finish.⁷⁶ Often burdened with financial obligations, these motivated high school graduates are a perfect target for military recruiting, and this generation, as motivated as they are by education, should be easily convinced to join if they believe the military can provide it in the future.

The economy that this generation has grown up with has been truly amazing. Millennials have never witnessed economic trouble. In fact, since 1985, the economy has witnessed, on average, only two weeks of recession per year, compared to the generation before them, who witnessed an average ten weeks of recession per year.⁷⁷ As discussed, this economic success can largely be attributed to the Boomer parents, who derive much of their satisfaction from work. This improved economy has also lead to one of the personality traits of the Millennials already discussed, that of optimism about the future. This optimism and strong economy provide a challenge to military recruiting, as mentioned earlier. The military is no longer viewed as a safe haven from low employment or economic recession.

Technology is one of the forces that define this generation. The Millennials have grown up with computers and the Internet, and their entire culture, attitudes, and beliefs have been molded by it. According to a Newsweek poll, 89% of teens use a computer at least once a week, 92% believe that computers will improve their educational opportunities, and 98% credit computers with improving their lives.⁷⁸ This generation believes that the Internet is a critical component of their future. Over half prefer the Internet to watching television, and in large part they are receptive to educational messages on the Internet as well.⁷⁹ As technology is the dominant force of influence on this generation, it is essential that the military tap into it as it develops its recruiting plans, and the Internet has to be a medium that is used to its full potential.

The media influences this generation almost as much as technology. The fact that the media has come to the Internet makes this no surprise. The abundance of media outlets, whether audio, video, or print, combined with the increased affluence of this generation, makes for a combination where the media can certainly have an affect on their attitudes, values, and beliefs. Additionally, research has shown that media forces are the dominant factors in shaping

youth perception about the military.⁸⁰ And unfortunately for the military, the media have tended to focus on its problems, such as hazing, sexual harassment, readiness problems, and some of its families being on food stamps.⁸¹ The news reported from Iraq and Afghanistan is seldom positive in nature either. And while respect for the military remains high, the negativity that the media perpetuates about military operations is having an effect on its ability to attract volunteers.⁸²

Attitudes and Propensity to Serve. In addition to the understanding the personality and the forces of influence when considering the Millennials with regard to military service, it is also necessary to understand what their thoughts are about the military and their propensity to serve in it. As mentioned previously, Millennials place a lot of importance on attending college. In fact, surveys taken at various high schools show that over 90% of teens plan to attend college after high school.⁸³ They understand that college graduates can demand more pay for their services and that more opportunities will open up for them. The obvious implication for the military is that it is going to continue to be challenging to recruit this generation into a profession that offers low starting pay and a structured hierarchical system where everyone starts at the bottom. Thus, the greatest challenge now to military recruiting is attracting the college-bound youth.⁸⁴

A committee on the youth population and military recruiting found in 2003 that several other aspects of youth attitudes and behavior among the Millennials provide potential guidance for the design of recruiting plans. Specifically:

- (1) the time in which youth make decisions about education and careers has extended well into their 20's; (2) there has been little or no change in youths' views about the military service as a workplace or the value and appropriateness of military missions; (3) there has been some increase in the desire of youth to have two or more weeks vacation-a benefit of military service over the civilian sector; (4) there is a possible link between youth attitudes toward civic duty and volunteerism and military service; and (5) parents, particularly mothers and counselors, have a strong influence on youth decisionmaking with regard to career and educational choices.⁸⁵

These attitudes bring to light some challenges for military recruiting as well as some obvious opportunities for possible exploitation.

Another interesting point about the Millennials' attitudes about military service can be found when looking at the reasons those who plan to serve gave for wanting to serve. In a study conducted in 2000 by researchers Birnbaum, Ezring, Howell, Schulz, and Sutton, they

found that virtually all of the teens in focus groups who indicated they wanted to serve were interested because of self-centered reasons. For instance, not one reply was for patriotic duty or service to the nation.⁸⁶

The propensity to enlist in the military has been declining since the mid-1980's, while prior to that time, propensity had been increasing. The percentage of males indicating that they definitely would join a military service declined from 12 to 8 percent, while the percentage indicating that they definitely would not join increased from 40 to 60 percent.⁸⁷ Incidentally, and not surprisingly, youth who have a parent or a sibling who has served in the military are more likely to serve to enlist than those who do not.⁸⁸ So why has the propensity to serve been on the wane? MAJ Chris Chambers, writing from the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy in 2000, wrote that "today's youth see a military with an uncertain future, ill-defined mission, long family separations, unequal living conditions, and general lack of choice [control] compared to a civilian career showing long term growth and promise, with greater rewards in familial and personal fulfillment."⁸⁹ It is not likely that the military is going to change quickly in terms of most of these points that MAJ Chambers writes about. For instance, long family separations will continue, the future will most definitely remain uncertain, the mission, while hopefully not "ill" defined will continue to change and evolve over time, and there will probably always be less control and choice in the military than with civilian jobs. The trick, obviously, will be to emphasize the positive aspects of service that appeal to the Millennial generation based upon their personality makeup.

To recap the general findings above about the Millennial's beliefs about military service, we know that:

- Higher education is the biggest competitor for recruits. Success to the Millennials equates to going to college, not to joining the military.
- As a result, the propensity to serve in the military is less for this generation than for previous generations.
- Technology and information improvements have been, and continue to be, a huge influencer on Millennial recruits.
- Most Millennials do not know much about the military and neither do more and more of their parents. This gap between the society and the military is likely to grow as the generations who fought in World War II and Viet-Nam die off.
- Parents (Boomers and X'ers) are a huge influence on their children with regard to military service.
- Most Millennials do not see the military as part of their future.

The Implications . Now that we have a feel for the personalities of the three generations that are currently serving and understand a little bit about what shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts about the military, it is important to look at the implications, especially as they relate to our newest generation, the Millennials. How should we recruit them, for instance, and what impact will the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation X have on their decision to serve and their performance in the military once they do decide, given the fact these earlier generations are Millennials' parents, teachers, first line supervisors, and senior leaders?

- We know that the Baby Boomer generation, who range in age from 46-63, and some X'ers, who are aged 26-45, are the parents of today's Millennials. As such, they are key influencers on whether or not their Millennials decide to serve in the military. The Boomer's anti-Vietnam war activism and attitudes are certain to have an adverse affect on the Millennial's attitudes about the military. On the other hand, Millennials lucky enough to have younger X'er parents may be influenced by the fact that their parent's generation likes adventure and living on the edge, and this could positively impact a Millennial's decision to serve.
- The first line supervisors and leaders of the Millennials are from Generation X. Remembering from the earlier discussion about this generation that they are not good team players and considering the fact that they hold the jobs that Millennials want, there is likely to be friction when these two generations try and work with each other.
- Compared to the Boomers and the X'ers, the Millennials are way more technologically savvy. It is imperative that the older generations who are doing the recruiting, training, and leading realize this and account for it, perhaps by engaging someone who has a routine, on-going exposure to this new generation.

Recruiting the Millennials : Recommendations . The following recommendations attempt to address the recruiting challenge while considering the overall personality and beliefs of the Millennials about military service, as well as the current cultural environment:

- To address the fact that most people in our society are not aware of what the military does, it needs *to better inform the American public on what the military mission is all about, especially with the objective of making parents understand its importance and benefits* . The first step in motivating the Millennials to seek military service is to ensure it is accepted as a profession by the public at large. This requires that the American public be better informed about the value and importance of public service. This public outreach is the responsibility

of the leadership, according to the Defense Science Board (DSB), appointed by Secretary of Defense Cohen in 1998 to study human resource issues within the DoD.⁹⁰ The leadership must clarify the military's mission, especially given the fact that it has recently taken on a lot of non-traditional roles, such as peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace-enforcement. It is especially important that emphasis is placed on the team aspects, personal growth opportunities, and technical/technology training opportunities that the military has to offer, given the personality profile of the Millennials. Additionally, while the nation's youth will remain the primary target of recruiting advertising, since their motivation to serve is heavily influenced by parents and other adults, it is essential that DoD undertake a public information campaign that is not targeted just at the Millennials, but also on their influencers, such as their parents, teachers, and counselors.

- Along these same lines, not only must the leadership inform the public about the military's mission, but it must also *help to shape its attitudes about the military as an institution and its attitudes about military service*, in general. Some examples of initiatives that the DSB recommended to address this challenge is the expansion of JROTC programs in high schools, the JROTC Career Academy Program, and the National Guard ChalleNGe program. They also recommended that more emphasis be placed on community outreach programs such as sending speakers to high schools, colleges, and civic groups.⁹¹ Certainly the War College's requirement to have each of its students conduct a public speaking engagement prior to graduation aligns perfectly with this recommendation. JROTC offers a great opportunity not only to educate the Millennials, but also their "influencers", parents, and teachers. Additionally, by increasing the JROTC programs in high schools, the problem of the growing trend of schools forbidding recruiters on their campuses could be addressed as well. Approximately one of four high schools forbids recruiters from coming on their grounds.⁹² In addition to JROTC, there must be an effort to establish programs in the middle-schools which emphasize values, duty, citizenship, and patriotism, since the Millennials do not see these as important reasons to join the military, as previously discussed. Additionally, courses in high school and colleges that deal with civil-military issues and civic responsibilities would go a long way toward helping to shape the public's attitudes about military service. Mr. Matthew Morgan, in his article entitled "Army Recruiting and the Civil-Military Gap," aptly summarizes these recommendations when he states, "It seems intuitive, and supported by evidence, that in order to continue to access sufficient numbers of high-quality youths, senior leaders will need to address far-reaching concerns involving the overall relationship between the military and society."⁹³

- *Ensure the recruiting apparatus is appropriately resourced today and into the future and explore novel approaches which improve the way recruiters do business.* Given the fact that Millennials are less likely to join the military than their predecessors, it is even more important to spend the dollars necessary on recruiting as well as to find innovative ways to accomplish the recruiting mission. One new initiative would be to increase the number of contracted personnel used to support the recruiting effort. Certainly, there are retired prior-service recruiters across the nation that could serve as regional field representatives that could help spread the good word about the military's benefits. Additionally, contractors might work well in augmenting both JROTC and ROTC programs on high school and college campuses. If required, this could also allow some recruiters to return to the "operational" military. New marketing methods such as commercial telemarketing should be expanded to screen and identify potential recruits. This could also be centralized under DoD to avoid redundancy, and once the propensity to enlist and the service prospect is determined, the lead could be handed over to the nearest recruiting station.⁹⁴ The Millennials are extremely technologically-savvy and expect their future to be as well. The individual recruiter representing the military must have access to the latest information age tools when they go out and talk with recruits and parents. Instant credibility will be given to the recruiter who can download, on demand, information from their laptops, and Millennial parents and recruits will believe that the military is an organization that values information technology.
- It is essential that the military leadership realize that the Millennials consider *college as their likely choice as compared to the military when looking at their future and tailor the recruiting plan accordingly.* A menu of college education options must be available to this generation. One educational initiative could include expanding the General Educational Development (GED) Plus Enlistment Program, which enables applicants who currently have not graduated from high school to be sponsored by the military to achieve enlistment standards through an attendance based course.⁹⁵ Another possible option would be to allow high school graduates to attend college at the expense of the military and then to enter the military at a higher rank. Increased funding for G.I. Bill type programs must be made available to increase the Millennials. Because this generation is optimistic and is concerned with their ability to be competitive in the labor market, the military must capitalize on its ability to be a bridge to college. Recruiting strategies need to emphasize that the military will help pay for college and will teach the skills necessary to succeed in college, their future jobs, and in life.

- Since Millennials, as pointed out above, are more likely to join something in which they can feel pride and a sense of purpose, it is necessary to *show the military as a provider of humanitarian efforts and as a provider of domestic support* both in its recruiting advertisements and in its activities to try and shape the public's attitudes about military service. This would suggest that to be attractive to the Millennials, military service would need to be perceived as a way to accomplish more than just warfare. In recent years, the military has been on the front lines in providing relief for natural disasters, in peacekeeping operations, and in support domestic missions, such as security at airports immediately following the events of September 11, 2001. The research indicates that this generation would look favorably upon these roles for the military and that they would be inclined to organization that accomplishes them. The key for the military is figure out a good way to emphasize these important missions that are being accomplished.
- *Focus on recruiting the community college dropouts and ensure educational benefits are emphasized.* It has been emphasized repeatedly that the majority of Millennials will try and attend some type of college after high school. This does not mean that the military should give up on these folks. For whatever reasons, 40-50 percent of those who go to community colleges fail to get their degree.⁹⁶ This population could provide an extremely lucrative target for recruiters, given their desire to learn, their ability to achieve at some level beyond high school, and their probable need for some type of income. Additionally, educational incentives are likely to be well received by this group, given the fact that they will eventually want to get back to college.
- A lot of discussion has been dedicated to the material benefits that the military has to offer. Free medical care, a great retirement package, educational benefits and packages, and a secure job that provides outstanding leadership experience are certainly great reasons to join the military. However, this generation seems to place other intangible benefits, such as values, moral accountability, and personal accountability on an even higher plane.⁹⁷ There is no organization that emphasizes these values more than the military. The "Army Values" and the fact that values are evaluated on fitness/efficiency reports are evidence of this fact. *The military needs to incorporate in its message the fact that it already has in place systems that require and place a great deal of importance on the traditional virtues, such as honor, courage, selfless service, trust, loyalty, and teamwork.* This last value, teamwork, is especially important, given the fact that Millennials value the concept of team a great deal.

Conclusion. There are other ideas that could be used to address the current recruiting challenge. Those mentioned above, however, are recommendations made specifically with the Millennial generation in mind, given their attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Understanding the Millennial generation also provides implications for important recommendations for retaining and leading them, as well. With out going into much detail, it will be necessary to closely monitor the quality of life for those already in the military, as potential recruits need to believe that they will be cared for if and when they join the military. Compensation benefits, health care, housing, educational benefits, and all of the other material benefits already mentioned are extremely important with regard to quality of life. Family care initiatives are critical as well, for as any commander knows, we recruit soldiers, but we retain families. Jobs that allow for choice and flexibility and multiple paths to success are important. Job changes and deployments, which will always be part of the military, must be made more predictable by the military leadership, especially with current high volume OPTEMPO that exists today.

Good leadership practices with the Millennials in mind will be crucial to retention as well. Here again, the intangible benefits of military service, such as morale, camaraderie, and esprit de corps need to be emphasized by leaders, since the Millennials like to feel accepted, part of a team, and part of something important. With this in mind, leaders also need to give these young soldiers not only tasks but also an understanding of what the purpose for accomplishing these tasks are.

Today, with the military under a great deal of stress from multiple deployments and the challenge of transformation, efficiently recruiting the current generation is as important as ever. While there are differences between the generations that are currently serving in the military, there are many similarities that must be focused upon, as well. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld writes, "The men and women in uniform today are, without question, the finest military in the world-probably the finest military the world has ever seen. The concept of an all-volunteer force has been a booming success. It works and it works well."⁹⁸

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